THE GREEK WOMAN

(Fragment, 1871)

Just as Plato from disguises and obscurities brought to light the innermost purpose of the State, so also he conceived the chief cause of the position of the *Hellenic Woman* with regard to the State; in both cases he saw in what existed around him the image of the ideas manifested to him, and of these ideas of course the actual was only a hazy picture and phantasmagoria. He who according to the usual custom considers the position of the Hellenic Woman to be altogether unworthy and repugnant to humanity, must also turn with this reproach against the Platonic conception of this position; for, as it were, the existing forms were only precisely set forth in this latter conception. Here therefore our question repeats itself: should not the nature and the position of the Hellenic Woman have a *necessary* relation to the goals of the Hellenic Will?

Of course there is one side of the Platonic conception of woman, which stands in abrupt contrast with Hellenic custom: Plato gives to woman a full share in the rights, knowledge and duties of man, and considers woman only as the weaker sex, in that she will not achieve remarkable success in all things, without however disputing this sex's title to all those things. We must not attach more value to; this strange notion than to the expulsion of the artist out of the ideal State; these are side-lines daringly mis-drawn, aberrations as it were of the hand otherwise so sure and of the so calmly contemplating eye which at times under the influence of the deceased master becomes dim and dejected; in this mood he exaggerates the master's paradoxes and in the abundance of his love gives himself satisfaction by very eccentrically intensifying the latter's doctrines even to foolhardiness.

The most significant word however that Plato as a Greek could say on the relation of woman to the State, was that so objectionable demand, that in the perfect State, the *Family was to cease.* At present let us take no account of his abolishing even marriage, in order to carry out this demand fully, and of his substituting solemn nuptials arranged by order of

the State, between the bravest men and the noblest women, for the attainment of beautiful offspring. In that principal proposition however he has indicated most distinctly—indeed too distinctly, offensively distinctly—an important preparatory step of the Hellenic Will towards the procreation of the genius. But in the customs of the Hellenic people the claim of the family on man and child was extremely limited: the man lived in the State, the child grew up for the State and was guided by the hand of the State. The Greek Will took care that the need of culture could not be satisfied in the seclusion of a small circle. From the State the individual has to receive everything in order to return everything to the State. Woman accordingly means to the State, what *sleep* does to man. In her nature lies the healing power, which replaces that which has been used up, the beneficial rest in which everything immoderate confines itself, the eternal Same, by which the excessive and the surplus regulate themselves. In her the future generation dreams. Woman is more closely related to Nature than man and in all her essentials she remains ever herself. Culture is with her always something external, a something which does not touch the kernel that is eternally faithful to Nature, therefore the culture of woman might well appear to the Athenian as something indifferent, yea—if one only wanted to conjure it up in one's mind, as something ridiculous. He who at once feels himself compelled from that to infer the position of women among the Greeks as unworthy and all too cruel, should not indeed take as his criterion the "culture" of modern woman and her claims, against which it is sufficient just to point out the Olympian women together with Penelope, Antigone, Elektra. Of course it is true that these are ideal figures, but who would be able to create such ideals out of the present world?—Further indeed is to be considered *what sons* these women have borne, and what women they must have been to have given birth to such sons! The Hellenic woman as *mother* had to live in obscurity, because the political instinct together with its highest aim demanded it. She had to vegetate like a plant, in the narrow circle, as a symbol of the Epicurean wisdom λάθε Βιώσας. Again, in more recent times, with the complete disintegration of the principle of the State, she had to step in as helper; the family as a makeshift for the State is her work; and in this sense the *artistic aim* of the State had to

abase itself to the level of a *domestic* art. Thereby it has been brought about, that the passion of love, as the one realm wholly accessible to women, regulates our art to the very core. Similarly, home-education considers itself so to speak as the only natural one and suffers State-education only as a questionable infringement upon the right of home-education: all this is right as far as the modern State only is concerned.—With that the nature of woman withal remains unaltered, but her *power* is, according to the position which the State takes up with regard to women, a different one. Women have indeed really the power to make good to a certain extent the deficiencies of the State—ever faithful to their nature, which I have compared to sleep. In Greek antiquity they held that position, which the most supreme will of the State assigned to them: for that reason they have been glorified as never since. The goddesses of Greek mythology are their images: the Pythia and the Sibyl, as well as the Socratic Diotima are the priestesses out of whom divine wisdom speaks. Now one understands why the proud resignation of the Spartan woman at the news of her son's death in battle can be no fable. Woman in relation to the State felt herself in her proper position, therefore she had more *dignity* than woman has ever had since. Plato who through abolishing family and marriage still intensifies the position of woman, feels now so much *reverence* towards them, that oddly enough he is misled by a subsequent statement of their equality with man, to abolish again the order of rank which is their due: the highest triumph of the woman of antiquity, to have seduced even the wisest!

As long as the State is still in an embryonic condition woman as *mother* preponderates and determines the grade and the manifestations of Culture: in the same way as woman is destined to complement the disorganised State. What Tacitus says of German women: *inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur aut responsa neglegunt,* applies on the whole to all nations not yet arrived at the real State. [Tacitus, Germania VIII][1] In such stages

[1] "Wherefore, they deemed [their womenfolk] to be, in truth, something sacred and prescient, neither spurning their counsels nor disregarding their opinions."

one feels only the more strongly that which at all times becomes again manifest, that the instincts of woman as the bulwark of the future generation are invincible and that in her care for the preservation of the species Nature speaks out of these instincts very distinctly. How far this divining power reaches is determined, it seems, by the greater or lesser consolidation of the State: in disorderly and more arbitrary conditions, where the whim or the passion of the individual man carries along with itself whole tribes, then woman suddenly comes forward as the warning prophetess. But in Greece too there was a never slumbering care that the terribly overcharged political instinct might splinter into dust and atoms the little political organisms before they attained their goals in any way. Here the Hellenic Will created for itself ever new implements by means of which it spoke, adjusting, moderating, warning: above all it is in the *Pythia,* that the power of woman to compensate the State manifested itself so clearly, as it has never done since. That a people split up thus into small tribes and municipalities, was yet at bottom *whole* and was performing the task of its nature within its faction, was assured by that wonderful phenomenon the Pythia and the Delphian oracle: for always, as long as Hellenism created its great works of art, it spoke out of *one* mouth and as *one* Pythia. We cannot hold back the portentous discernment that to the Will individuation means much suffering, and that in order to reach those *individuals* It *needs* an enormous step-ladder of individuals. It is true our brains reel with the consideration whether the Will in order to arrive at *Art,* has perhaps effused Itself out into these worlds, stars, bodies, and atoms: at least it ought to become clear to us then, that Art is not necessary for the individuals, but for the Will itself: a sublime outlook at which we shall be permitted to glance once more from another position.